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ABSTRACT

A study of institutions of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) in Scotland evaluated the content and presentation of their current charters; assessed the reactions of students, employers and members of local communities to varying examples of local charters; identified the steps that institutions have taken to monitor the impact of their institutional charter and to review its style and content. The study surveyed 59 FE and HE institutions, made a content analysis of institutional charters, and conducted focus groups consisting of students, local community users, and employers who assessed examples of local charters. Findings indicated that there were differences of opinion about the value that a charter document can add to existing practices and procedures. Charters varied greatly in terms of their detailed contents, but many charters contained the same basic elements: a statement of what users can expect from the institution, what the institution expects of the user, and information about how a user should make a complaint. Focus groups indicated that the institution should be clear about the object of the charter; the charter should list the rights and responsibilities of students and information relating to the charter principles; and the charter should have a colorful and careful design and good organization. (CK)

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ED 398 819

Local Charters from Further and Higher Education Institutions

A Survey of Practice

John Hall
Teresa Tinklin
Kevin Lowden

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Local Charters from Further and Higher Education Institutions

A Survey of Practice

John Hall
Teresa Tinklin
Kevin Lowden

SCRE
The Scottish Council for Research in Education

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1 Background

The *Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland* (FHE Charter) was published in September 1993. In the foreword the Secretary of State for Scotland stated the expectation that further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions would produce their own local charters, developing the principles set out in the national Charter. SCRE's evaluation of the FHE Charter (Hall *et al*) showed that, in May 1994, the majority of FE and HE institutions either had, or planned to have, some form of 'charter'. This, however, was using a broad definition of the term 'charter', to include any document or documents covering the topics outlined in the national charter.

The project described in this report constitutes an assessment of the local charters produced to date by institutions of further and higher education.

2 Aims and Methodology

Aims

The aims of the research were as follows:

1 To analyse the content and presentation of current charters published by further and higher education institutions in Scotland.

2 To assess the reactions of students, employers and members of local communities to varying examples of local charters.

3 To find out from institutions what steps they have taken to monitor the impact of their institutional charter and to review its style and content.

4 To offer suggestions about the format and content of charters likely to be most useful and accessible to members of insitutions' user communities.

Methodology

There were three strands to the research:

1 a survey of FE and HE institutions.

2 content analysis of institutional charters.

3 focus groups of users of FE and HE institutions.

Survey of FE and HE institutions

In order to determine how many institutions had produced a local charter or similar document and to find out what steps institutions had taken to monitor the impact and review the style and contents of their charters, a questionnaire was sent to every FE and HE institution in Scotland. A total of 65 institutions (43 FE, 22 HE) were contacted in this way in February 1996. At the same time, the research team requested that copies of institutional charters be returned with the completed questionnaire. Chapter 3 presents the findings from this survey.

Content analysis of institutional charters

The institutional charters collected were submitted to a content analysis in order to:

- determine the extent to which the contents of local charters cover the topics already identified in the FHE Charter;
- identify topics covered by local charters which are not in the FHE Charter;
- identify features of the presentation of charters which may affect their reception.

The findings from the content analysis are reported in Chapter 4.

Focus groups of users of FE and HE institutions

In order to assess the reactions of different user groups to varying examples of local charters, the research team aimed to conduct six focus groups: two of students, two of local community users and two of employers. It was intended that each of the six groups would be set up with the help of a different FE or HE institution. For each user group (students, local community, employers) one FE and one HE institution were approached for assistance. Participants recruited through one institution were then interviewed together as a group and not mixed with participants recruited through other institutions. It was particularly important to interview groups of FE and HE students separately, as our evaluation of the FHE Charter showed that significant differences in practice occurred in the FE and HE sectors. Similarly, members of the local community using FE and those using HE were interviewed separately allowing a comparison of their views. In practice, it proved very difficult to recruit participants for the employers' groups and, in the end, group interviews with employers were not carried out. A full report of this and the findings from the focus groups are reported in Chapter 5.

3 Survey of Further and Higher Education Institutions

The aims of the survey of FE and HE institutions were as follows:

- to determine how many institutions had produced a local charter or similar document and to ask institutions to provide the research team with a copy of their charters
- to find out whether institutions were routinely providing the information specified in the FHE Charter to their users
- to find out how institutions were distributing their charters and making them available
- to find out what steps institutions had taken to evaluate their charters;
- to find out the ways in which institutions had altered their charters since first publication.

The sample

All further and higher education institutions in Scotland were contacted by telephone initially in order to identify the individual with responsibility for charter-related matters. This person was then contacted in February 1996 and asked to complete a questionnaire. The FE institutions included all FE colleges but excluded (in the northern islands) FE units. The HE institutions included universities and specialist HE institutions.

Table 3.1 shows the total number of institutions contacted and the number of questionnaires returned. Overall 59 of the 65 questionnaires sent out were returned completed, giving a response rate of 91%.

Table 3.1: Responses to the survey of FE and HE institutions

	Questionnaires sent out	*Questionnaires returned*	*Response rate*
FE	43	38	88%
HE	22	21	95%
Total	65	59	91%

The questionnaires had been completed by members of staff in various different positions. Table 3.2 shows that, in FE, the majority of questionnaires had been completed by the principal, assistant principal, a member of staff in student services or a member of the guidance staff. In HE, one-third had been completed by the principal or assistant principal and another third had been completed by the registrar or admissions officer.

Table 3.2: Member of staff who completed the questionnaire

	FE (38)	HE (21)	Total (59)
Principal/assistant principal	15	7	22
Student services/guidance staff	15	0	15
Registrar/admissions officer	0	7	7
Secretary of institution	0	5	5
Other	8	2	10

Institutional charters

Respondents were asked whether their institutions had produced or were planning to produce charters. Table 3.3 shows that the picture is very different in FE and HE. In FE, 37 of the 38 institutions that responded to the questionnaire had already produced or were planning to produce their own charters and the one remaining institution had produced a charter-type document which was not referred to as a charter. In England and Wales all further education colleges are required by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) to produce their own charter. The FEFC National Survey Report (1996) concluded that all FE colleges had met this requirement. In Scotland the requirement differs. All FE colleges have been requested to provide information in their development plans on the steps they have taken to produce individual charters.

One-third of HE institutions indicated that they had either produced a charter already or were planning to produce one. Over half of HE respondents stated that they had other documents which refer to the areas covered in the national Charter. One institution had a charter-type document which was not referred to as a charter.

Table 3.3: Institutions that had produced their own charters

	FE (38)	HE (21)	Total (59)
Produced own charter	31	6	37
Producing/planning to produce own charter	6	1	7
Produced charter-type document which is not called a charter	1	1	2
Have other documents which refer to the areas covered in the national Charter	0	11	11
No charter and no plans to produce one	0	2	2

As stated before, two of the institutions (1 FE, 1 HE) had actually produced a charter-type document, but given it a different title. The reasons they gave for not using the title charter' were that it was too formal or that it had connotations of government initiatives.

Those institutions that did not have a charter nor any plans to produce one were asked to give their reasons for this. Table 3.4 shows that almost all institutions that answered this question gave the answer that the information identified in the FHE Charter was already

available in other documents provided by the institution or that the institution was already meeting the requirements of the FHE Charter and had decided not to produce an institutional charter in addition to this.

Table 3.4: Reasons for not producing a charter

	*No of institutions (13)**
Information identified in the FHE Charter already available / institution already meets requirements of FHE Charter	12
Subscribe to / use the FHE Charter	4
Financial constraints	3
More appropriate to target relevant information at users concerned	3

*Institutions may have given more than one response to this question

Six institutions (5 FE, 1 HE) did not respond to the questionnaire. From an SOEID telephone survey carried out in October 1995, we are able to say that all 5 of the FE institutions that did not respond to the questionnaire had produced or planned to produce a charter and that the HE institution had not produced a charter.

■ Information provided by institutions

In order to determine whether institutions were meeting the standards laid down in the FHE Charter in terms of the information that they provide to their users, respondents were asked to indicate whether they routinely provided any of the types of information shown in Table 3.5 to their current or prospective users. All institutions were routinely providing information on courses available, how to apply and on facilities, services and guidance available to students. Almost all institutions indicated that they routinely provided information on sources of financial assistance and on the services and facilities available for students with special needs. The majority of both FE and HE institutions also indicated that they routinely provided information on quality, equal opportunities, complaints procedures, graduate destinations and services available for employers and the local community.

Table 3.5: Information routinely provided by institutions to their current or prospective users

	FE (38)	*HE (21)*
Courses available	38	21
How to apply	38	21
Sources of financial assistance	37	21
Facilities, services and guidance available to students	38	21
Steps taken to assure the quality of teaching and other services	30	15
Equal opportunities policy	34	17
Information for employers	36	17
Services available to the local community	28	15
Complaints procedures	34	16
Destination of previous students	24	18
Services and facilities available for students with special needs	36	21

Distribution and availability of institutional charters

The rest of the chapter will refer only to those institutions that have a charter or a charter-type document (FE = 32, HE = 6). The number of HE institutions should be 7, but one institution declined to answer the questions as they felt they had not produced a charter because their charter document was more a directory of sources of information.

Respondents were asked to indicate to which groups of institutional users their charter was routinely distributed and in what ways their charter was made available. Table 3.6 illustrates that the majority of institutions routinely distributed their charters to their enrolled students and that some also distributed them to staff, prospective students, employers and schools. A few institutions indicated that they distributed them to 'all users'.

Table 3.6: Groups to which charters were routinely distributed

	*FE (32)**	*HE (6)**
Enrolled students	22	4
Staff	9	1
Prospective students	3	2
Employers	4	1
All users	4	1
Schools	3	0
Other	6	1

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one group, all respondents gave at least one answer.

Table 3.7 shows that institutions were making their charters available in various different ways. In FE institutions, charters were included in student handbooks, given out or discussed at induction, made available at various locations around the college or displayed on noticeboards. In HE, charters were given out with course documentation, displayed on noticeboards or made available in the library.

Table 3.7: Ways in which charters were made available

	*FE (32)**	*HE (6)**
Student handbook	10	0
Given out/discussed at induction	10	0
Available at various locations	9	0
Displayed on noticeboards/walls	4	2
Given with course documentation	1	2
Available in library	0	2
Other	4	0
No answer given	4	0

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one way

Evaluation of institutional charters

In order to find out about ways in which each institution had evaluated its charter, respondents were asked about how the impact of their institutional charter had been monitored and about any steps that had been taken to review its style or contents.

In all, 8 institutions (7 FE, 1 HE) indicated that they had monitored the impact of their charters (see Table 3.8). Four institutions had sought the views of their users through surveys, market research or focus groups, two had monitored the charter's impact by reviewing their complaints procedure or their counselling and guidance provision, one had carried out an internal audit and another had set up a working group to identify performance standards. Although a relatively small number of institutions had monitored the impact of their charters at the present time, almost all the remaining institutions said they had plans to do this in the future. Only four institutions indicated that they had not monitored the impact of their charters and had no plans to do so.

Table 3.8: Institutions that had monitored the impact of their charters

	FE (32)	*HE (6)*
Monitored the impact	7	1
Plan to monitor the impact in the future	22	4
No plans to monitor the impact	3	1

Just over one-third of the institutions (13 FE, 1 HE) stated that they had reviewed the contents of their charters (see Table 3.9). Six institutions had done this on the basis of comments and feedback from staff and students, four on the basis of comments from staff alone, two had compared their own charters with those of other institutions, one had updated the contents and another had made minor editorial changes. Again, almost all institutions that had not already reviewed the contents of their charters had plans to do so in the future. Only two FE institutions had no current plans to do this.

Table 3.9: Institutions that had reviewed the contents of their charters

	FE (32)	*HE (6)*
Reviewed the contents	13	1
Plan to review the contents in the future	17	5
No plans to review the contents	2	0

Ten institutions (9 FE, 1 HE) had reviewed the appearance or presentation of their charters (see Table 3.10). Two had done this by consulting a design team, two had sought the views of their users and two had done this through staff consultation. Eight of the ten institutions described changes that they had made or intended to make to the appearance or presentation of their charters. These included changing the font or the layout, printing the charter professionally, making it shorter, producing a summary or including it in the student handbook. Again, the majority of institutions who had not already reviewed the appearance of their charters had plans to do so in the future. Six FE institutions stated that they had no current plans to review the appearance of their charters.

Table 3.10: Institutions that had reviewed the appearance or presentation of their charters

	FE (32)	*HE (6)*
Reviewed the appearance	9	1
Plan to review the appearance in the future	17	5
No plans to review the appearance	6	0

Revision of institutional charters

Respondents were asked to describe any alterations that had been made to their institutional charter since its first publication and to give their reasons for making these changes. In all, 11 institutions (10 FE, 1 HE) indicated that they had altered their charter in some way since its first publication. The types of changes made are detailed in Table 3.11. Very few institutions stated explicitly their reasons for making these changes, but often the reasons can be inferred from the answers given. For example, if an institution stated that it had made the standards laid down in its charter more realistic and achievable, this suggests that the original standards stated had been too high.

Table 3.11: Alterations made to charters since their first publication

	*FE (10)**	*HE (1)**
Changed/improved appearance	3	0
Made standards more realistic/achievable	2	0
Added more topics	2	0
Altered to take account of other information provided	2	0
Added information on new policies/services	2	0
Changed to leaflet format/shortened it	2	0
Added/altered grievance procedure	1	1
Reduced number of student obligations	1	0
Simplified language	1	0
Changed font	1	0
Altered to take account of user views	1	0

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one kind of change

Respondents were also asked to describe any alterations that they intended to make in the future and, again, to give their reasons for these changes. Overall, 25 institutions responded to this question. Various different answers were given and these are detailed in Table 3.12. Again, no institution stated explicitly their reasons for making these changes.

Table 3.12: Alterations that institutions intend to make to their charters

	*FE (21)**	*HE (4)**
Don't know yet	7	3
Will update information in charter	5	0
Will simplify language/make more user friendly	2	1
Will include/spell out mutual obligations	2	1
Will reflect feedback from users	2	0
Will take account of review of complaints procedure	2	0
Will reflect review of institution's commitments	1	0
Will print professionally	1	0
Will produce charter poster	1	0
Will include in student handbook	1	0
Will include a broader range of best code of practice	0	1

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one kind of alteration

Of the 11 institutions referred to in Table 3.11 and the 25 institutions referred to in Table 3.12, 9 were the same. A total of 27 institutions (23 FE, 4 HE), therefore, had already made changes to their charters, intended to alter them in the future or both.

Final comments

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to make any other comments about their charters or about institutional charters in general. Overall, 27 institutions (23 FE, 4 HE) chose to make a comment. Table 3.13 details the comments made.

Table 3.13: Final comments

	*No of institutions (27)**
Point of clarification on questionnaire responses	8
Positive comment on the effect of the charter (eg charter has clarified procedures/standards for staff/students; has encouraged openness about concerns/complaints; is a useful yardstick for measuring performance).	6
The charter has had little impact/there is little interest in it	5
Actual standards/procedures/ethos more important than the charter	3
The student handbook is of more interest to students	2
It is very important to include student responsibilities as well as institutional commitments in the charter	2
Other comment	2

*Respondents may have made more than one comment

Summary of findings

- 38 FE institutions and 21 HE institutions responded to the questionnaire giving a response rate overall of 91%.
- All FE institutions had produced their own charters or were planning to do so. Only one of these had produced a document which was not referred to as a charter.
- Only 6 HE institutions had produced their own charters or were planning to do so. One other had produced a charter-type document, which was not referred to as a charter.
- Those institutions that had not produced charters mainly gave the reason that they already provided the information identified in the FHE Charter or that they were already meeting the requirements of the FHE Charter.
- The majority of institutions were routinely providing the information specified in the FHE Charter to their users.
- The majority of institutions were routinely distributing their charters to their enrolled students. Some were also distributing them to staff, employers, prospective students and schools.
- Charters were being made available through the student handbook, at induction, on noticeboards and at various locations throughout institutions.
- Eight institutions had monitored the impact of their charters, although the majority planned to do this in the future.
- Just over one-third of institutions had reviewed the contents of their charter and about one-quarter had reviewed its appearance. The majority of institutions planned to review their charter's contents and appearance in the future.
- A total of 27 institutions had altered their charter since its first publication and/ or intended to alter it in the future.

Conclusions

Those institutions that had decided not to produce a charter almost unanimously gave the reason that they were already meeting the requirements of the FHE Charter and saw no need to produce a charter document in addition to this. Indeed, our findings show that almost all institutions, whether they had a charter or not, were routinely providing users with the information specified in the FHE Charter. **There are clearly differences of opinion about the value that a charter document can add to existing practices and procedures.** This is highlighted by the responses given to the final comments section of the questionnaire. Almost the same number of institutions stated that their charter has had a positive effect on the institution as stated that it has had little or no impact.

Most institutions viewed their charter as a document that would be subject to evaluation and review. A minority of institutions had already taken steps to monitor its impact and review its style and contents, the majority intended to do this in the future. **Consideration needs to be given, therefore, to the best ways of monitoring and reviewing charters in order to assess their impact and improve their presentation and contents.**

4 Content Analysis of Local Charters

A detailed analysis of the contents and appearance of local charters was undertaken in order to:

- to determine to what extent local charters cover the topics already identified in the FHE Charter;
- to identify topics covered by local charters which are not in the FHE Charter;
- to identify features of the presentation of charters which may affect their reception.

A note on the classification of information

During the analysis, it was discovered that the type of information given by charters varied greatly. This has been represented in some of the tables in this chapter as it seemed an important distinction. For example, some charters gave full clear information about a topic (eg a full statement of the institution's equal opportunities policy) (classified I in the tables), others merely mentioned a topic in a simple statement (eg 'There is an equal opportunities policy') (classified S), some told readers that they could expect information on the topic (E) and others told users where they might get information on it (W). Those institutions in each case that made no mention of a particular topic are classified NM in the tables. The key used in the tables is represented here for reference and at various points throughout the chapter.

Key			
S	Makes a statement about this	I	Gives detailed information on this topic
E	Tells user what they can expect	NM	Makes no mention of this
W	Tells user where they can get information		

The charters

A total of 35 local charters were analysed (28 FE, 7 HE). They included two charter-type documents (1 FE, 1 HE) which had not been called charters and one 'charter pack' (FE) which included a variety of leaflets and brochures. All documents will be referred to as 'charters' in the remainder of this chapter.

Target groups for charters

The charters had been targeted at different groups of users. Table 4.1 shows that almost all had been targeted at students but smaller numbers specifically mentioned other users such as employers, members of the local community or applicants.

Table 4.1: Target groups for charters

	*FE (28)**	*HE (7)**
Students	28	6
Applicants	16	5
Employers	11	2
Local community	9	2

* Charters may have been targeted at more than one group.

How local charters compare to the FHE Charter

This section sets out the areas covered in the FHE Charter and the numbers of FE and HE institutions that refer to these areas in their charters.

Standards of service

The FHE Charter sets out certain standards of service that users can expect from institutions. These are listed in Table 4.2. It is clear from the table that not all institutions mentioned these standards in their own charters. Half or more of FE institutions mentioned enquiries, teaching standards and assessments but fewer than half mentioned applications, feedback on progress, standards for financial dealings or complaints. Almost all HE institutions mentioned applications, teaching standards, assessments and complaints but few mentioned enquiries or standards for financial dealings.

Table 4.2: Standards of service

	FE (28)	*HE (7)*
how enquiries will be dealt with	19	3
how applications will be dealt with	12	5
standards of teaching and supervision of research	14	5
access to staff/feedback about progress	12	4
standards for dealing with assessments	16	5
standards for financial dealings	6	2
how complaints will be dealt with	13	6

Information

The FHE Charter specifies certain types of information that different user-groups can expect from institutions. It also gives information on where to get information on courses available, on how to apply, on sources of financial support and on how to apply for financial support. Table 4.3 shows that, on the whole, very few FE or HE charters listed the information that applicants, employers, new students, local community users or post-graduates might expect from the institution and no charters stated where users might get information on courses available in further and higher education. This is not surprising since these are quite general topics, more appropriate for a national charter than a local one. Few FE or HE institutions chose to include information on how to apply in their charters, but almost all HE and over half of FE charters mentioned sources of financial

support. Overall, only 3 FE charters referred to how to apply for financial support. Half the FE charters and almost all the HE charters referred to information on courses, most of them telling the reader what information they could expect.

Table 4.3: Information

	FE (28)					*HE (7)*				
Information:	S	E	W	I	NM	S	E	W	I	NM
for applicants	-	7	2	1	18	1	2	-	-	4
for employers	-	3	-	-	25	1	-	-	-	6
for new students	1	6	-	1	20	-	2	-	-	5
for local community	-	1	-	-	27	1	-	-	-	6
for post-graduates	-	-	-	-	28	2	1	-	-	4
on courses available in FHE	-	-	-	-	28	-	-	-	-	7
how to apply	2	3	1	2	20	-	1	2	-	4
sources of financial support	-	6	5	4	13	-	2	2	2	1
how to apply for financial support	-	-	2	1	25	-	-	-	-	7
information on courses	-	8	4	2	14	1	2	3	-	1

Equal opportunities and quality assurance

The FHE Charter makes clear statements about equal opportunities and quality assurance procedures in further and higher education. Table 4.4 shows that all except 6 local charters referred tc equal opportunities. Most of these made a statement about the subject such as 'There is an equal opportunities policy'. Few chose to go into the subject in detail. Four of the 7 HE charters mentioned quality assurance procedures, while fewer than half the FE charters made reference to them.

Table 4.4: Equal opportunities and quality assurance

	FE (28)					*HE (7)*				
	S	E	W	I	NM	S	E	W	I	NM
Equal opportunities policy	17	1	-	5	5	3	1	1	1	1
Quality assurance procedures	3	1	2	4	18	1	-	2	1	3

Services and facilities

The FHE Charter details institutional services and facilities that users can expect access to where they exist. All FE charters mentioned welfare, advice and guidance and almost all mentioned careers or pre-exit guidance. About half mentioned counselling, pre-entry guidance, services and facilities for students with special needs, leisure, sport and recreational facilities and other facilities such as the library, computers or the canteen. Very few mentioned medical facilities,child-care, accommodation or facilities and services for overseas students. Almost all the HE charters mentioned counselling, medical facilities and accommodation. Only 2 mentioned pre-entry guidance. All other facilities and services were mentioned by over half the HE charters.

On the whole, very few charters actually gave detailed information about the services or facilities. Where charters mentioned a service or facility they were more likely to tell the reader what information they could expect about a service, where they might get information about it or to simply mention that the service was available.

Table 4.5: Services and facilities

	FE (28)					*HE (7)*				
	S	E	W	I	NM	S	E	W	I	NM
Careers/pre-exit guidance	4	14	2	2	6	1	2	2	-	2
Welfare/advice/guidance	4	18	3	3	-	2	1	1	-	3
Counselling	4	10	1	1	12	2	3	1	-	1
Pre-entry guidance	1	12	-	1	14	-	2	-	-	5
Services and facilities for students with disabilities or learning difficulties	-	7	3	3	15	1	2	1	1	2
Medical facilities	1	1	2	-	24	2	3	1	-	1
Child-care facilities	2	1	4	2	19	2	1	1	-	3
Leisure, sport and recreational facilities	2	5	4	2	15	1	2	1	1	2
Facilities and services for overseas students	-	1	-	1	26	1	2	1	1	2
Other facilities eg library, computers, canteen	3	7	2	2	14	1	2	2	-	2
Accommodation service	-	3	4	1	20	1	3	1	1	1

Key			
S	Makes a statement about this	I	Gives detailed information on this topic
E	Tells user what they can expect	NM	Makes no mention of this
W	Tells user where they can get information		

Making views known

The FHE Charter explains ways in which users can make their views known to institutions if they feel dissatisfied with some aspect of the service provided. It also mentions that constructive comments and feedback are welcomed by institutions. Table 4.6 shows that the majority of FE and HE charters referred to both suggestions and feedback and complaints procedures. Twelve of the 20 FE charters and 3 of the 6 HE charters that referred to complaints procedures gave information about how users could actually go about making a complaint. The rest simply stated that complaints procedures existed or that information was available on them. Few FE charters but most of the HE charters mentioned academic appeals. Where they were mentioned, few charters actually gave any details of the procedures involved.

Other topics mentioned by the FHE Charter

The FHE Charter also mentions fairly briefly disciplinary codes, academic regulations, the destinations of previous students, student representation and work placements. Table 4.7 shows that most FE and HE charters mentioned student representation but very few discussed any of the other topics. The code of discipline and academic regulations were sometimes mentioned in terms of expectations of the user (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.7: Other topics mentioned by the FHE Charter

	FE (28)					HE (7)				
	S	E	W	I	NM	S	E	W	I	NM
Suggestions/feedback	2	9	-	10	7	2	3	-	-	2
How to make a complaint	4	2	2	12	8	-	-	3	3	1
How to use the academic appeals procedure	3	2	2	3	18	-	-	4	1	2

Key			
S	Makes a statement about this	I	Gives detailed information on this topic
E	Tells user what they can expect	NM	Makes no mention of this
W	Tells user where they can get information		

Useful contacts

The FHE Charter lists useful contacts for users. Few local charters did so (6 FE, 3 HE).

Topics covered by local charters which are not in the FHE Charter

The main way in which local charters differed from the FHE Charter was that the majority of local charters included expectations of the user. There were a number of other topics as well which could be found in local charters but not in the FHE Charter.

Expectations of the user

Overall, 16 FE charters and 6 HE charters stated user responsibilities or obligations. These are listed in Table 4.8 in descending order with compliance with health and safety regulations being the most often cited expectation. Expectations concerning attendance and assessments and assignments were also popular.

Table 4.8: Expectations of the user

	FE (28)	HE (7)
Health and safety	12	2
Attendance	11	2
Assessments/assignments	9	4
Rules/regulations	6	3
Behave in a responsible manner	8	1
Make most of opportunities available	5	2
Respect college/people	3	3
Play part in ensuring equal opportunities	5	1
Academic regulations	5	-
Participation	4	1
Develop academically and personally	3	1
Code of discipline	3	1
Enjoy studies	3	-
Commit certain amount of time/effort to study	2	1
Accept responsibility for own learning	2	-
Develop study skills	2	-
Help promote college	1	-
Provide accurate information on applying	-	1
No expectations of user stated	12	1

Other

Various other topics were mentioned by local charters which were not included in the FHE Charter. These are detailed in Table 4.9 in descending order with the most often mentioned topic first. The three topics most often mentioned by local charters concerned how the institution would treat its users, learning support and induction.

Table 4.9: Other topics mentioned by local charters but not by the FHE Charter

	FE (28)	HE (7)
How institutions will treat users (courtesy, respect, safe, clean surroundings)	16	2
Learning support	16	-
Induction/welcome	15	1
A range of services and facilities	12	2
Mission statement	8	3
Tutor support	6	4
Choice/control over learning programme	8	-
Appropriately qualified/committed/enthusiastic staff	8	-
An appropriate and relevant learning experience	8	-
Standards for information	4	1
Nationally recognised qualifications	4	1
Well-planned teaching/learning experience	3	-
Academic action plan	3	-
Training/tuition that reflects local/national employment needs	3	-
Classes to start/finish on time	2	-
Sexual harassment policy	-	2
Anti-racist policy	-	2
Transport information	2	-
Course that meets requirements of validating body	1	-
Information for mature students	-	1
Flexible patterns of study	-	1

Appearance of the charters

The charters varied widely in their appearance. One FE institution had produced a pack which included documents which varied in terms of their appearance, so these have not been classified in the following tables.

Table 4.10 shows that there was a great deal of variation in the size and length of the charters. Most of the HE charters were A4 size, the FE charters varied in size. Over one-third of the charters overall, whatever their page size were 1-2 sides long and about one-fifth were longer than 10 sides.

Table 4.10: Page size and length

Page size	Length	FE (27)	HE (7)
< A5	1-2 sides	3	-
	2-10 sides	3	-
	> 10 sides	1	1
A5	1-2 sides	3	-
	2-10 sides	6	1
	> 10 sides	3	-
A4	1-2 sides	6	1
	2-10 sides	1	3
	> 10 sides	1	1

Over half the FE charters and about half the HE charters were printed on glossy paper. The remainder were printed on plain paper or card (see Table 4.11). The 11 FE charters and 3 of the 4 HE charters that were printed on plain paper appeared to have been produced using a photocopier. The rest had been printed professionally (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.11: Type of paper

	FE (27)	HE (7)
Plain	11	4
Glossy	16	3

Table 4.12: Printing

	FE (27)	HE (7)
Photocopy	11	3
Professional	16	4

Most of the charters had been printed using one or two colours (see Table 4.13). Just under one third were multi-coloured.

Table 4.13: Colours

	FE (27)	HE (7)
One colour	13	4
Two colours	5	1
Multi-coloured	9	2

Most of the FE charters and all of the HE charters were separate documents. Five FE colleges had incorporated their charters into their student handbooks and two of these had also produced them as separate documents (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14: Separate document/in handbook

	FE (27)	HE (7)
Separate	22	7
Separate + in handbook	2	0
In handbook	3	0

Charters also varied in the way they addressed their readers. Table 4.15 shows that over half the FE charters used the second person, the remainder used the third person or both. The HE charters were divided equally between second and third person, with one using both.

Table 4.15: Form of address

	FE (27)*	HE (7)
Second person	15	3
Third person	5	3
Both	6	1

* One did not use either.

Summary of findings

Comparison of local charters with the FHE Charter

- In terms of the standards of service specified in the FHE Charter, only standards for assessment were mentioned by the majority of both FE and HE charters. Over half the FE charters also mentioned enquiries and almost all the HE charters mentioned teaching standards and how applications and complaints would be dealt with.
- Very few FE or HE charters listed the information that applicants, employers, new students, local community users or post-graduates might expect from the institution and no charters stated where users might get information on courses available in further and higher education. These are quite general topics, more appropriate for a national charter than a local one.
- Few FE or HE institutions chose to include information on how to apply in their charters, but almost all HE and over half of FE charters mentioned sources of financial support.
- Half the FE charters and almost all the HE charters referred to information on courses, most of them telling the reader what information they could expect.
- Most charters referred to equal opportunities, usually mentioning the topic rather than giving detailed information.
- Half the charters referred to quality assurance procedures.
- Very few charters gave detailed information about services and facilities. Where charters mentioned a service or facility, they were more likely to tell the reader what information they could expect, where they could get information or to simply mention that the service was available. Large numbers of FE charters mentioned welfare, advice, guidance and careers guidance. Very few mentioned medical facilities, child-care, accommodation or facilities and services for overseas students. Almost all the HE charters mentioned counselling, medical facilities and accommodation.
- The majority of FE and HE charters referred to complaints procedures and suggestions and feedback. Just over half of those that mentioned complaints gave information about how a user might actually make a complaint.
- In terms of other topics covered by the FHE Charter, most charters mentioned student representation.
- Few local charters included useful contacts.

Topics not included in the FHE Charter

- The main way in which local charters differed from the FHE Charter was that the majority of them included expectations of the user. Over half the FE and almost all the HE charters included user expectations. The three expectations cited by most charters concerned health and safety, attendance and assessment and assignments.
- Various other topics were mentioned in local charters which were not included in the FHE Charter. The ones most often mentioned concerned how the institution would treat its users (eg with respect, safe, clean surroundings), learning support and induction.

Appearance of the charters

- The charters varied greatly in terms of their size and length.
- Two-fifths had apparently been produced using a photocopier, the rest had been printed professionally.
- Most had been produced as a separate document, a small number were included in the student handbook.

■ Conclusions

While there was some degree of overlap between the contents of the FHE Charter and local charters, **institutions had by no means simply copied the national Charter**. Most institutions, it seemed, had used the FHE Charter as a guide but tailored their own charter to emphasise or state topics relevant to their own particular institution.

Charters varied greatly in terms of their detailed contents, but **many charters contained the same basic elements**: a statement of what users can expect from the institution, what the institution expects of the user and information about how a user could make a complaint.

Charters varied greatly in terms of the level of detail they included: some constituted a brief statement of principles, sometimes telling the reader where further information was available, while others constituted a source of detailed information on the topics mentioned. Within individual charters the level of detail varied also depending on the topic being discussed. For example, there was a clear tendency amongst local charters to mention services and facilities available without giving detailed information about them, but to give full, clear information about how a user might make a complaint.

Charters varied greatly in terms of their appearance. Over half had been printed professionally, the remainder had apparently been photocopied. Most were produced and distributed as a separate document: only a small number were included in the student handbook.

5 The Focus Groups

The aim of this part of the research was:

- to assess the reactions of students, employers and members of local communities to varying examples of local charters.

In order to gain some insight into the views of various user groups, the research team aimed to conduct six focus group interviews: two groups of students; two of local community users; and two of employers. It was intended that each group should have approximately eight members (in practice, the numbers varied from five to ten per group).

The groups were shown five examples of locally produced charters, which varied extensively in their size, content and presentation. They were asked to record their initial impressions of the visual attractiveness, usefulness and contents of each charter in a short booklet provided. They were then invited to discuss their impressions of each of the charters, guided by the interviewer.

Summaries of groups

The groups were made up as follows:

Group A consisted of higher education students who were either class representatives or elected members of the students association of a Scottish university in one of the major cities.

Group B consisted of students from a further education college in a separate major Scottish city.

Group C consisted of adult trainees from a local voluntary centre in a medium-sized town in eastern Scotland. As a community-based group they made use of the facilities offered by a local further education college, and some members of the group were planning to enter full- or part-time further education in the following academic session.

Group D was a group of adults who were members of extra-mural classes at one of the ancient Scottish universities.

The groups were therefore of very disparate composition, consisting of further education students, higher education students, adults taking their first steps back into education, and a group which can best be characterised as professionals who had had successful experiences of education in their own lives. It was this last group which tended to stand out in their responses from the others.

Various strategies had been used to set up the employers' groups. The first was to approach LECs in two areas. However the LECs were unable to supply lists of employers with links to further and higher education, and there was some question about whether

they would have been willing to divulge this information if they had had it. We therefore tried to approach employers through the further and higher institutions themselves. In one university a member of staff with responsibility offered to help arrange a group, but ran into problems finding a sufficient number of people who were willing to participate and who could meet at the same time. Another further education college supplied us with a list of 25 employers who had dealings with the college, and a member of SCRE staff tried to set up the interviews.

From the twenty five employers who were identified by the further education college, SCRE contacted 18 who varied in size and type of business and attempted to obtain their co-operation. The main responses from the employers when asked to participate in the focus groups were:

11 felt that they could not provide useful information to the study as they did not know enough about local charters. This was despite having been given detailed information over the telephone about the project and about our rationale for wanting to speak to employers;

3 asked for further information but went on to say they felt they could not help;

2 said they did not have the time and would be unable to attend any group within the project time scale;

2 said they would consider attending a group but were difficult to contact or could not provide firm details of their commitment.

All employers/businesses contacted were willing to listen to the researcher and discuss the research over the telephone but they seemed to see the issue of local charters as a vague and largely irrelevant issue. They were, however, positive about their contact with further and higher education institutions. During our contact with the employers, they were asked to confirm whether they had dealings with further and/or higher education institutions. All 18 said yes and many of these commented that such contact had been valuable.

Previous research, including that done at SCRE, has shown that attempts to gather information from employers on educational issues is a difficult task. Telephone interviewing is often a more successful method of researching employers' views but this often involves many call-backs before the interview can be conducted.

We can speculate that while the employers seemed positive about their links with further and higher education they see issues such as institutional charters as having a relatively low priority. This may be because they conduct business with institutions through different routes and procedures to many other 'clients'. However, we must also remember that when employers (and others) say they have nothing of worth to contribute to the research, this might be one way to avoid having to spend their time on an exercise they see as relatively unimportant compared with their immediate business issues.

■ The example charters

Five charters were chosen as examples of the range of different approaches to presentation and content. These were chosen from the examples sent in by colleges and universities. Brief descriptions of each are given below, together with summaries of the groups' reactions to them, and some illustrative quotations from the groups.

The following conventions are used in the transcriptions:

"xxxxx" - double quotation marks enclose the actual words used by group members.

'xxxxx' - single quotation marks are used for other quotations - names of documents, phrases from documents etc.

... - three dots indicate that a brief portion of transcription has been omitted (usually because of repetition or hesitation by the speaker)

... // ... - a double slash between two sets of three dots indicates that a larger portion of transcription has been omitted. In this case the portion omitted usually includes an interruption by another speaker, or a section of general conversation.

Where an extract from a transcription contains quotations from more than one speaker, each speaker is labelled 'A:' 'B:' etc. The group from which each extract originates is shown in brackets.

Charter 1. This was a single A4 glossy sheet, folded in three to form a small leaflet. It was printed in one colour (not black) on white. It is called a 'students' charter' and contained a foreword from the principal, brief paragraphs about various facilities (guidance, learning support, creche etc), policies (equal opportunities, assessment and appeals) and a schematic explanation of the college grievance procedure. It did not contain names, addresses or contact telephone numbers where further information could be sought.

Comments from groups. This was seen as a simple, relatively inexpensive, but also professionally produced document which was clearly addressed at students and adopted an appropriate tone and approach. It was readable and understandable, with appropriate contents. Statements of policies were welcomed, as was the stress on quality, support and guidance, but more on facilities would have been welcomed by the student groups.

It lacked any statement of what was expected from students (and the student groups would have welcomed this) and there was no indication of where to get further information. While the charter did briefly address channels of communication within the institution, an accompanying diagram which was supposed to outline avenues through which students could pursue grievances was felt to be unnecessarily complicated and ambiguous. It was felt that the format of the document meant that it was unlikely to be kept for future reference.

" ... the colour actually made it more attractive than the black colours"

(Group A)

"Not at all impressed. Doesn't look important. No names and addresses."

(Group B)

A: "Just like a typical flyer. If you give a student a flyer they chuck it in the bin"

B: "It's not going to be used for reference again. They're just going to take one look and chuck it."

(Group B)

Charter 2. This was a nineteen page A4 stapled document, with blue card back and front covers, with the college name, logo and the words 'Student Charter' on the front cover. It was photocopied on only one side of the paper, and used a small font size. Its contents were extensive, making it, in effect, a student handbook. Its first page was a table of contents arranged alphabetically as an index. It contained, not only names and contact numbers for relevant college staff, but also names, addresses and numbers for important outside bodies (education authorities, grant awarding bodies, the student loan company), as well as statements of policies, procedures and facilities available to students.

Comments from groups. Initial reactions to this document were negative. It was seen as poorly produced and cheap, not even having been photocopied on both sides of the paper. It looked "home made". The small size of the print used was also criticised, and some thought that the layout was unpleasant and sometimes confused. There was thought to be some repetition within the text. The addition of colour and graphics would have helped to improve its appearance.

However, it was also praised for its comprehensiveness. As a handbook, its full scope was seen as useful and informative, as was the inclusion of a list of contact names. It was said to be simple to read and comprehensive, and the general conclusion was that it would be retained for future reference by students. The index of contents also received particular praise and there were several positive comments about the tone of the language used, which was seen as welcoming and as reinforcing the idea of partnership and of aiming to help. While the responsibility for learning was explicitly placed on the students, this was expressed in a way which was seen as "not dictatorial".

Three out of the four groups rated this as one of the 'most useful' of the charters. The fourth group gave no rating. The student groups were particularly responsive to this charter.

> *A: "It has actually shown that you can do these things, you can get something good without that much of a budget ..."*
>
> *B:" ... because it listed contacts throughout and not just - it had addresses at the end, it had contact names throughout the thing, if you've got a problem with this, see this person ..."*
>
> *C: "It was more of a reference guide"*
>
> *D: "How many people actually get hold of this and read it from cover to cover?"*
>
> *C: "They won't read it from cover to cover but they might have an interest in one particular thing."*
>
> (Group A)

> *"Unless you opened it up it looked like it was going to be boring and bland from the cover, and it didn't turn out that way once you'd gone inside"*
>
> (Group A)

> *"The first instant that you look at it you think 'Oh my God, so much reading', but then when you open the front page and you see the contents bit, it tells you everything that you need to know ... and it's something that you're going to go back and refer to, a book like that. You're going to keep that beside you."*
>
> (Group B)

Charter 3. This was not a single document but a set of three related documents: a 'Clients' Charter', a 'Students' Code of Commitment' and a 'Students' Disciplinary Code'. Each was a folded A5 leaflet, of between four and eight sides, printed in colour on glossy paper. The 'Clients' Charter' set out standards of service and complaints procedures and provided a list of major institutional contacts. The 'Students' Code of Commitment' detailed what was expected of students, and the 'Students' Disciplinary Code' explained disciplinary procedures and measures.

Comments from groups. These were seen as well-produced leaflets with good, clear layout and of a reasonable size. The graphics were clear, and the use of colour and bullet points were specifically mentioned, as was the presence of two symbols indicating that the institution had won awards for quality of provision. The initial impression given is that the institution is working to high standards of service.

The logic of separating the information into three booklets, in the particular way that it had been done, was questioned by many of the group members, although one member of one group did like this feature. Others thought that the 'Clients' Charter' should have separated the information for students from the information for other users. There was not thought to be enough in these leaflets about the academic role of the institution, or about its duties to its students, compared to the entire two leaflets given over to the 'Students' Code of Commitment' and 'Disciplinary Code'. The lack of contact names and telephone numbers was also noted.

There was much comment in all groups about different features of the language used in these documents. The 'Disciplinary Code' was thought to be expressed in a legalistic and dictatorial way. The very name 'Clients' Charter', received unfavourable comment, as did such terms as 'customer care services'. It was thought that the 'Clients' Charter' was more a marketing tool for the institution than a charter. The symbols were referred to by some as "the clocks stamped all over it" and "the wheel-type things".

A: "It seems to be selling [the institution] to people, rather than information for the students ..."

B: "They're like marketing tools."

(Group A)

" ... 'customer care' idea - what they said in a paragraph could have been said in a sentence."

(Group B)

A: "It looks like you want to read it ..."

B: "But it could have been in one book rather than in three separate ..."

C: "They concentrated on stuff that wasn't of any interest, like how long it takes to answer the telephone."

(Group C)

"The language is awful! Really. 'Customer Care Services'? That's like dry cleaning!"

(Group D)

Charter 4. This was not a 'Charter' as such. The actual charter consisted of one page in a thirty-six page 'Student Handbook'. This handbook was an A4 sized document with a full colour cover, and containing a full range of college information for students. The handbook also contained advertisements for banks and local businesses. The charter itself was presented at the beginning of the handbook and consisted of a preamble, two sets of bullet points (entitlements of, and obligations upon, students) and a brief outline of the institutional 'complaints and commendations' procedure (which was detailed more fully elsewhere in the handbook). The focus groups were presented with the full handbook, and were invited to comment on it, but were also specifically directed to this charter page.

Comments from groups. This document was thought to address the needs of students well. It mentioned both the students' and the institution's commitments, and was thought to be both informative and relatively clear. The contents page was welcomed. Sections on health, useful telephone numbers and study hints were appreciated. The higher production values of the full colour cover did not carry over into the inner pages and some group members felt that it could have been better laid out with better use of graphics. Some members thought that the interior was "lacking in character".

The actual charter was seen as a focused and comprehensive statement of intention which could be used separately, but which gained from being in the context of the handbook. Group D differed from this view - they drew a sharp distinction between 'charters' (which they saw as brief statements of policy) and 'handbooks' (which were information guides for students) and thought that they should be kept separate. For Group D the fact that the 'charter' was in the 'handbook' only served to obscure it.

Overall, this charter was rated as probably the second most 'useful' document (after Charter 2), although some rated them equally. However, there were negative comments, some relating to the design (mentioned above) and others about some aspects of the language used. It was thought to be wordy, sometimes over-formal, and occasionally patronising. The phrases 'learners' charter' and 'quality enriching educational experience' from the charter page itself, were commented on negatively. The presence of advertisements was also thought to be a distraction.

> *"You have to keep reading over it until you get what points they're trying to make. But it's not got any depth and it's just repeating a lot of the same thing."*
>
> (Group B)

> *A: "I thought it was the best one really. Informative, there was lots of information and detail ... // ..."*
>
> *B: "I didn't like it ... // ... Reading into it I think it was the words they used, it was like being at school ..."*
>
> (Group C)

> *"I thought it quite pathetic in a way ... that it seemed to patronise them. That 'every [institutional name] learner' - I find that quite patronising, and I think that - what is it? - 'the development of academic action'. I thought 'Why are we here?'."*
>
> (Group A)

Charter 5. This was a double-sided sheet of A4 paper headed with the name of the institution and the title 'Student Charter'. It was printed black on white and had no graphical elements. It consisted of a preamble and a series of numbered paragraphs setting out the information to which students are entitled access, what they can reasonably expect, and what the institution expects of them. There was no indication in the charter itself of where this information could be found, and no other documentation accompanied the charter.

Comments from groups. This had the virtue of being brief and to the point. It was particularly welcomed by Group D as a straightforward statement of principles. Other groups disagreed, some commenting that it seemed clear and concise at first, but that on further reading, many of the statements were vague.

There were two major criticisms of this document. The first was that it looked cheap and gave the impression the institution had put little effort into it. It read as a set of rules and regulations with no useful detail attached. While it did mention that more information was available, it did not say where this could be obtained. Many of the group members agreed that a single sheet of paper such as this would either be lost quickly or thrown away.

The second criticism concerned the language used. The tone was thought to be "terse" and "impersonal" and the wording of the preamble suggested to some group members that the only reason that the institution had produced a charter was because they felt that it was expected of them.

> *" ... at the very beginning it says 'In the spirit of the government this-and-that-and-the-other' - as if to say 'We'd better do this because the government have got this charter out, and for no other reason."*
>
> (Group A)

> *"Just a piece of paper. Just forget it ... They'd be better having nothing than having that, because that makes you doubt their sincerity."*
>
> (Group B)

> *A: "Terrible, really"*
>
> *B: "Very bad."*
>
> *C: "Like they couldn't be bothered"*
>
> (Group C)

> *"You see - this is a <u>simple</u> [strong emphasis] statement, which is clear. All the others are PR documents, which is a different thing."*
>
> (Group D)

■ General comments

The views of Group D tended to diverge from those of the others. The flavour of the group discussion which took place with this group is illustrated by the fact that it opened with one member complaining that an apostrophe had been omitted from the title of one

'Students Charter' (sic). Later another member complained that as far as he was concerned a charter was an historical document granting an institution university status. This led to an extended discussion of the origins and motivation of the Citizens' Charter initiative and probably coloured the group's decision to say that Charter 5 had the most appropriate content and length for a charter (though not for a student handbook). The group felt that the charter had nothing to offer them as external users of a higher education institution. Rather they felt that charter principles (insofar as they were any other than the law of the land, plus some courtesy) were embodied in the personal contacts they had with the institution.

■ Conclusions from the focus groups

From the comments made by participants in the focus groups it is possible to form a few conclusions about users' views of charter documents.

The institution should be clear about what the document is for. Some of the examples we used seemed to have more than one purpose. Were they 'charters' or marketing documents? Or were they 'charters' or student handbooks? Is the 'charter' a list of principles which can seem vague and impersonal when stated in the abstract, or does it include the full range of information, policy and practice which embodies those principles? Whichever route an institution takes it should be clear about what it is doing and why it is doing it in this way.

The ways in which the group interviews were conducted did tend to separate out discussion of the content of documents from their presentation. Nevertheless, it is interesting that there seemed to be a consensus in favour of **content over form**. This was particularly evident in the groups' reactions to Charter 2, which was admitted to be poorly presented, but which won over many of the respondents when they looked at its contents.

In terms of **desirable content** we can begin to draw out some tentative conclusions. There was fairly general agreement that there ought to be a list of the **rights and responsibilities** of students (in particular), although some thought that this might be too legalistic and would probably prefer alternative terminology such as **reasonable expectations and commitments.** Either way, there was a recognition that charter principles could work both ways.

This list of rights and responsibilities could form the basis of a statement of charter principles, which might be no more than one or two pages long, and could be used as a separate document if wished. However, this would not be sufficient in itself. In addition all groups saw the value of providing either **information relating to the charter principles**, or at least a **statement of where to obtain that information**. This would ideally include the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the appropriate contact persons.

In terms of detailed content there was little to differentiate these groups from the list in the national charter. Institutional policies, procedures (including complaints and appeals), services and support facilities should all be detailed somewhere accessible. There was some notable resistance to "statements of the obvious" and to items which were considered trivial (time taken to answer telephones).

The **presentation** of the charter might have been regarded as secondary to its content, but it was nevertheless recognised as important. Short and glossy leaflets were more

likely to be picked up and read, but more substantial documents would be kept. Again, this is a question of the purpose of the documents.

Colour, graphics, careful design and reasonable font sizes were all mentioned at some point as positive features of good presentation. They showed a degree of professionalism and implied that the institution cared enough to do the job properly and was therefore also likely to care about its students or other users. However, unless they were matched by the content, they were dismissed as marketing devices.

Good organisation of the document was also mentioned. In particular the use of an index or table of contents in some of the larger documents, and clear bullet points in some of the smaller ones, were mentioned favourably.

A feature of several of the example charters which attracted comment was **the tone or register of the language used**. There were two main faults apparent in some of these charters. The first was to mistake the degree of formality which was appropriate. Some were judged to be too formal, impersonal, or even "legalistic" or "dictatorial" in the way that they set out their principles. Others veered towards the "patronising". The second major fault was to lapse into jargon, in particular that variety of jargon which the members of these groups clearly associated with marketing and public relations. Particular examples have been given in the discussion of the example charters.

In contrast, example Charter 2 was praised for its warm and direct language. When it spoke of 'partnership' between the institution and students the focus group members believed it.

6 Summary of Issues Arising

The following list summarises the points made at the end of chapters 3, 4 and 5 and points to some issues arising from the findings.

- There are clearly differences of opinion about the value that a charter document can add to existing practices and procedures in institutions. (Chapter 3)
- Consideration needs to be given to the best ways of monitoring and reviewing charters in order to assess their impact and improve presentation and contents. (Chapter 3)
- Institutions had by no means simply copied the national Charter. Most, it seemed, had used the FHE Charter as a guide but tailored their own charter to emphasise or state topics relevant to their own particular institution. (Chapter 4)
- Charters varied greatly in terms of their detailed contents, but many charters contained the same basic elements: a statement of what users can expect from the institution, what the institution expects of the user and information about how a user could make a complaint. (Chapter 4)
- Charters varied greatly in terms of the level of detail included: some constituted a brief statement of principles, sometimes telling the reader where further information was available, while others constituted a source of detailed information on the topics included. (Chapter 4)
- Charters varied greatly in terms of their appearance. Over half had been printed professionally, the remainder had apparently been photocopied. (Chapter 4)
- Some charters seemed to serve more than one purpose (marketing documents, student handbooks, statements of principles). Whichever route an institution takes it should be clear about what it is doing and why it is doing it in this way. (Chapter 5)
- For users, the contents of a charter took precedence over its appearance. (Chapter 5)
- Users agreed that a charter should include the rights **and** responsibilities of students. (Chapter 5)
- All user groups saw the value of providing either information relating to the charter principles, or at least a statement of where to obtain that information. This would ideally include the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the appropriate contact persons. (Chapter 5)
- The presentation of the charter might have been regarded as secondary to its content, but it was nevertheless recognised as important. (Chapter 5)
- Colour, graphics, careful design and reasonable font sizes were all mentioned at some point as positive features of good presentation. (Chapter 5)
- Good organisation of the document was valued. (Chapter 5)
- The tone or register of the language used conveyed a strong impression of the institution and its attitude towards students and other users. (Chapter 5)

References

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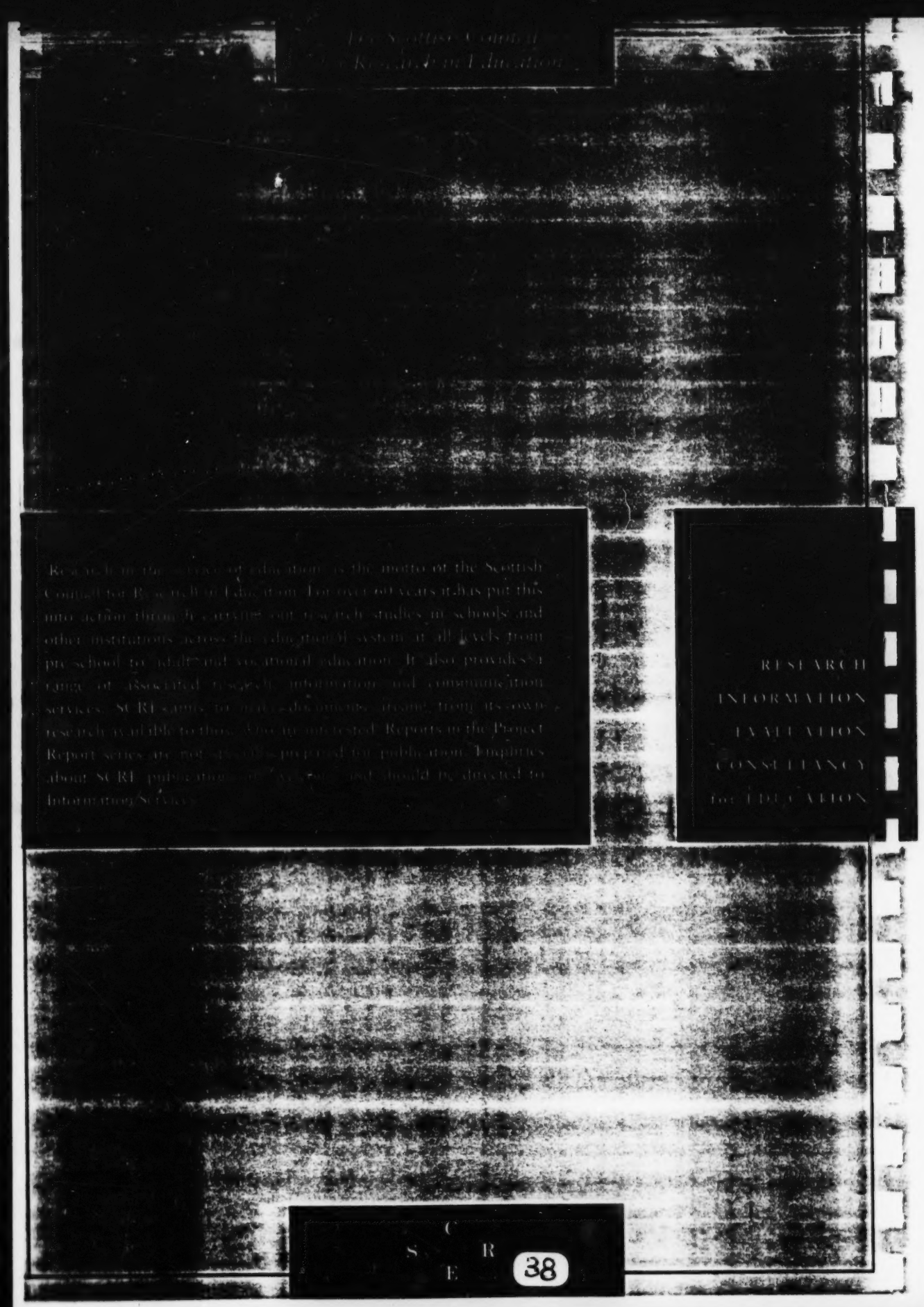

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